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Letter dated 18 July 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sweden and Uruguay, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, hereby share a summary note of the meeting held on 23 March 2017 on women and peace and security in Yemen (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Elbio **Rosselli**
Ambassador

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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Summary of the meeting on Yemen, 23 March 2017

On 23 March, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held its first meeting on women and peace and security in Yemen. Members received a briefing from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen and the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden opened the meeting. She highlighted the importance of the Informal Expert Group in providing Security Council experts with field-based expertise and up-to-date information and analysis and welcomed the Yemeni women's agenda for peace and security, which had been drawn up by representatives of Yemeni civil society and shared in November 2016 with the Secretary-General, the Special Envoy, the Council and the sponsors of the peace process. She particularly emphasized the importance of the participation of women in the peace process and the need for political solutions that included women in order to ensure sustainable peace and development.

The National Dialogue Conference in Yemen, held in 2013/14, saw the participation of women reach unprecedented levels and resulted in important agreements on a future constitution. It was, however, interrupted by the armed conflict and followed by two years of violence and exclusionary politics. Based on the agreed outcomes of the Conference, the Office of the Special Envoy had continued to ask the parties to ensure that at least 30 per cent of their delegates attending rounds of peace talks and political dialogue were women and that the same quota should be applied to a government of national unity, but the parties were yet to heed that call. For example, during peace negotiations in Kuwait in 2016, only 3 of 28 delegates had been women. In September 2015, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) had helped to launch a 60-member network of women from civil society and political parties — the Yemeni Women Pact for Security and Peace — which the Special Envoy identified as a regular source of advice and consultation to him and his team on a broad range of issues, from local governance to security management, de-escalation, malnutrition and other items on the agenda of the talks.

The representative of UN-Women summarized the priorities outlined by the Yemeni Women Pact in the eight meetings held by the network in the previous six months: an immediate ceasefire and the primacy of political over military solutions; the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian aid and the need for its equitable distribution; and the resumption of comprehensive peace negotiations on the basis of inclusiveness and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference, including the importance of the representation of women at all levels of government. The network had highlighted repeatedly that civilians were the first to be affected by the embargo and that female-headed households had been the hardest hit by the suspension of the support of the Social Welfare Fund to 1.5 million beneficiaries in Yemen.

The presenters highlighted the impact of the humanitarian crisis on women and girls. Yemen had already ranked last in gender equality rankings when the conflict erupted and, six months after its outbreak, incidents of gender-based violence had increased by 70 per cent. It was estimated that 3 million women and

girls of reproductive age were currently at risk of gender-based violence. Massive internal displacement had given rise to negative survival strategies, such as child marriage and forced prostitution, in both displaced and host communities. There were concerns about possible linkages between migration, trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence by armed groups operating in Yemen, but they were vastly underreported owing to shame, stigma and fear of retaliation, lack of service coverage and the requirement for service providers to refer cases to the police. There were few medical professionals trained to respond to sexual violence and no national guidelines on the clinical management of rape. Only 45 per cent of health facilities were functioning. In only two years, the conflict had reversed two decades of gains in education, and the percentage of Yemeni women who were illiterate was projected to reach 66 per cent, up from 50 per cent only a few years previously. In some areas, more than 30 per cent of displaced households were headed by women, a notable increase from 9 per cent before the current crisis. Those households suffered from greater food insecurity and had a significantly lower monthly income.

Responding to questions about the capacity to address those challenges, the Special Envoy said that his Office was setting up an advisory unit on women and peace and security, but would have extrabudgetary funding for only a year. The humanitarian country team had had a senior humanitarian gender adviser since April 2015 and had made protection and gender the cornerstones of the country team workplan for 2017, improving the level of gender sensitivity in its assessments and projects and paying special attention to collecting sex-disaggregated data across most humanitarian clusters. The gender-based violence subcluster, which consisted of 30 organizations, had an operational presence in 19 of 22 governorates, with coordinators in Sana'a and Hudaydah in the north and Aden in the south, but had received only a quarter of the $9 million that it had requested for its programmes in the previous year.

Recommendations by the participants and the secretariat of the Group included:

(a) Fund the humanitarian appeal and elevate maternal health, family planning and gender-based violence services as priorities in the emergency response, on a par with other life-saving interventions. Specific interventions should include free access to family planning services, increasing the availability of the minimum initial service package for reproductive health in emergencies and clinical management of rape, emergency obstetric care and safe houses and material support to displaced households headed by women and girls;

(b) Facilitate the participation of women from all parts of Yemen in the ministerial-level pledging conference in Geneva in April 2017 and all other international forums;

(c) Establish monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements for conflict-related sexual violence, with special emphasis on its linkage with migration and trafficking;

(d) Request the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1373 (2001) concerning counter-terrorism to ensure that gender equality considerations informed all its assessments, technical assistance and recommendations with regard to Yemen, in accordance with resolutions 2242 (2015) and 2331 (2016);

(e) In future negotiations on the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Yemen, suggest adding the clause "including sexual and gender-based violence" in respect of violations of applicable international human rights law as part of the listing

criteria and increase the capacity of the Panel on gender-related issues, which were currently covered by one expert who was responsible for many other areas;

(f) Ensure sustainable funding to support the capacity of the Office of the Special Envoy in the area of women and peace and security;

(g) Include in future decisions, resolutions, presidential statements, press statements or other types of statements of the Security Council concerning Yemen:

(i) Calls for parties involved in the conflict to ensure that women represented at least 30 per cent of those involved in all peace negotiations and to include an independent all-women cross-party delegation,

(ii) Condemnation of all attacks on women's rights activists and women human rights defenders and calls for monitoring and reporting mechanisms that enabled women activists to safely report concerns about their security;

(iii) Calls for the United Nations and its donors to ensure that gender expertise was systematically available to humanitarian actors and that gender analyses and assessments were routine;

(iv) In recalling existing obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty, calls for the cessation of weapon transfers to parties where there was a substantial risk that they would commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law — a recommendation been repeated multiple times by women's organizations in their reports from or about Yemen.

The Co-Chairs committed themselves to sharing those recommendations with relevant Yemeni stakeholders and to meeting again six months later.